

DECK HAD TOO MANY CARDS.

IF THERE'S anybody in this game that isn't satisfied with the way it's played," said Hump John, "the best thing he can do is to cash in. The motto of the house is 'Chips for money and money for chips.' There won't be any difficulty about getting full value for all the ivories you have left."

The proposition sounded more liberal than it looked. For a glance around the table showed that nearly all the chips in sight, besides a large roll of currency, were directly in front of the speaker.

There must have been \$2,000 at least in his pile, while all the chips of the other players put together would hardly have totaled up \$100. They all had money in sight, but the indications were that they were all losers.

"Ain't gettin' cold feet are you, John?" inquired Jim Handy with a sneer.

"No," said Hump John, quietly, "I'm never the one to break up a game of poker in my own house, but I'm free to say that systematic and unanimous cussing at the luck I'm having has grown a little bit tiresome to me. If you can't take your medicine, I don't see any reason why you have to keep on playing."

"I'm playing to get back what I've lost. I don't mind saying that," said Big George. "But I reckon I'd have a better show to do it if you didn't fill so many four flushes on your own deal."

"Now, that's enough of that," said Hump John, still speaking quietly, but speaking very slowly and very distinctly. "There ain't goin' to be any trouble here unless there has to be, but if it comes it'll come quick, an' there'll be enough to go 'round. If any man has anything to say, it'd be more like a man to say it, an' not be chuckin' nasty language. If there's any more of it, it'll be from me, an' what I'll say will be 'Shut up or get out.'"

"Oh, I don't know," said Shorty, "I've seen men try to stop a North American citizen from talkin' while he played poker, but I haven't never seen 'em have no great success at it. I reckon I'll make remarks when I feel like it, whether I win a pot or lose it."

"An' I haven't never been gagged that I remember," said Pat Brown, as he lighted a fresh cigar. "Seems like it was part of the game to say what you liked. Anyway, that's the way I play."

Hump John looked around the table from one to another, as if taking their measure. He was a professional gambler who had been up and down the Ohio river for years, but had been in Cairo only a few months.

His poker room had become a resort for those who were looking for a big game, and presumably a fair one. He had never been caught cheating, and he never had a pal in the game with him, so although he was usually a winner, he was believed to play square.

His nickname came from a personal deformity, and like many humpbacks he was pale and rather thin. Those who looked closely at him, however, could see evidence of great bodily strength, for his frame, though misshapen, was massive, his arms long and his hands muscular.

Jim Handy was another professional gambler, whose usual custom was to play on the river boats, but who sometimes stopped over in some of the river towns for a week at a time when he could find a game worth playing. The others were steamboat men, one a pilot and the others mates on Mississippi river packets.

There was not one in the party who did not know how dangerously near an explosion they were, and there was not one who did not know that enough had been said already to provoke a fight if Hump John elected to fight.

Apparently he did not desire it, but no one made the mistake of supposing that it was because he was afraid. Stories of his dealing during had been brought from up the river in times past, and though no one had ever seen him in any difficulty in Cairo, his courage was not doubted. Only his prowess was, for a casual glance impressed the observer with the notion that he was physically weak.

He looked around now, not angrily, but as one who debates a question with himself. Then with a grunt of discontent he said:

"Very well. If you gentlemen want a conversational game you needn't be surprised if I make a few remarks myself when the time comes for 'em.'"

"All right," said Pat Brown, cheerfully. "I thought we'd get you woke up after a while."

But Hump John made no reply to this. He had been silent throughout the game, as was his custom, until he had made his remark about the malcontents cashing in, listening imperturbably to the complaints they made about their luck and only speaking when they began to talk about him in a way that might have led a more hasty man to pull a gun.

He had been rifling the cards while the talk that followed his remark went on, for it was his deal and the deck was in his hands. Now he passed them on to Shorty to cut. Pat Brown put up his ante and the deal was on.

They were playing table stakes and the larger bets were made in money so that more chips were not really needed, but Hump John had just received over some bills to Hump John for exchange, and the game went on smoothly enough. White chips were half a dollar apiece, red \$2 and blues \$10, and as the ante was two whites there were few bets made of less than \$10 after the draw.

That kind of game easily runs into big money, so that there was nothing surprising about any one's losses. The exasperating thing was that Hump John was the only winner, and that was in his own game.

They had seen nothing wrong in his play thus far, but this had not been because of any lack of vigilance on their part. He who plays poker anywhere along the Mississippi river, especially if he plays with strangers or with professional gamblers, learns very soon to scrutinize the game closely.

These five were all veteran players, well able to hold their own in most games, and apt to win heavily against ordinary players. Any one of them could have turned a few neat tricks in the game had he chosen, or had he dared to do it, but Hump John and Jim Handy were the only ones the others suspected.

Handy might have been suspected of being in collusion with Hump John had it not been known that there was bad blood between them. He had stacked up against Hump John's game twice before and had gone back up the river, basted and wrathful, swearing vengeance and threatening all sorts of things if ever he should catch his adversary in any crooked play.

No one had ever done that, however, and Hump John had only laughed at him, telling him contemptuously that he must be the worst kind of tinnam gambler to put up that kind of talk, just because he lost. This time he had come back with a desperate determination to get square, but as has been seen there was no immediate prospect of his doing it.

When he picked up his cards in this deal, however, his eye gleamed and the corner of his lips tightened ever so little. School himself as he would, he had never been able to overcome entirely the habit of expressing his thoughts by his facial expression. People said that was why Hump John had beaten him hitherto.

What he saw was the eight, nine, jack and queen of hearts, with a spade

to fill. The chance was one in three of betting, with a possibility of a well-nigh invincible hand, and he had no hesitation in coming in.

It chanced that Big George and Shorty both had good hands and they both came in, whereupon the dealer threw in three red chips, making a raise of \$4.

This was too strong for the ante man, who had nothing to draw to, so he dropped his hand. That brought it to Handy again, and he showed a blue forward without a word.

So small a raise as he had made was enough for Big George, who threw his cards on the table. Shorty, however, came in, seeing the double raise after some study, and Hump John made it \$10 more.

Then Handy studied. Evidently Hump John was strong, and it was all in the draw for four flush. Moreover, Shorty, having played as far as he had, would probably see the \$10 additional, which the double raise after some study, and Hump John made it \$10 more.

The best play seemed to be to make good and wait for the draw; and, accordingly that was what he did. Shorty swore under a white chip also. His king did not look as large as they had at first, but he put up his ten and closed the pot.

Handy let his one card, which he drew, lie face down on the table and threw in a white chip. Shorty also took one card and left that lie unlooked at, throwing in a white chip also.

Thereupon Hump John, who had taken two cards, looked carefully at them and threw in a white chip and a stack of blues. It looked as if he were bluffer, or had had a full house or had possibly caught his fourth to three of a kind.

Anyhow, it was enough to make Handy look at his draw. What he found was the ace of hearts, and he knew that his ace flush was worthless unless Hump John was really bluffing.

The size of the bet, though—\$200 in a pot that held only a little over \$400—looked much like a bluff, and he finally called. He would have been "poor poker" to raise again.

Shorty laid down and Hump John showed his hand. It was a seven full. Evidently he had drawn a pair of trays.

"Your luck holds," said Handy, going a little white around the mouth.

"Yes, it holds," said Hump John, fiercely. "Don't you like it?"

"Oh, I like it, most amazing," said Handy, with a sneer. "I don't see any reason why you shouldn't like it, too, while it lasts."

"Well, I do," said Hump John. "An' I'm going to back it as long as it does. You can make up your mind to that."

"Fool if you didn't," growled Big George, and Pat Brown took the deck. It was evident that trouble was imminent. That deal and the next three were uneventful. A jackpot was made and sweetened twice before the cards came to Shorty. Then Handy took in the money on a pair of aces with no stayers, and the deck passed to Hump John again.

Again there were some good cards dealt out. Pat Brown had made the usual ante and they all came in up to the dealer, and he raised it as he had before. Again they all came in, so that there was \$30 in the pot before the draw.

It was evident that all four of the other players were watching Hump John narrowly, but if he felt any perturbation he did not betray it. Coolly and steadily as if he had been drinking a glass of water, he slipped off the cards as they were called, giving himself two, as he had done on his previous deal.

It was Handy's bet again, and he threw in a blue chip—plainly an invitation for a raise, since he would have to pay \$200 to prove a doubtful full, and much more than \$10 if he had wanted to drive the others out. He had taken only one card, however, and the others were afraid to raise except Hump John. He looked carefully at his two and raised it a stack.

It was enough for Brown and he surrendered. Handy, however, went back at him with two stacks. At that the others laid down and Hump John bet two stacks more.

Handy counted the money in front of him and found enough to see Hump John's raise, about \$100 more. Putting it all the pot, he said:

"I'm sorry I didn't declare another thousand in."

"So am I," said Hump John, quietly, as he covered the bet and showed down four jacks.

It was the winning hand, for Handy had been betting on a king full, but while Hump John was pulling in the pot a knife flashed through the air, grazing his wrist so that the blood spouted, piercing through the unbuttoned portion of the deck and penetrating the heavy table to the depth of fully two inches.

Before the oath was off Hump John's lips Shorty spoke up coolly:

"I wasn't after your hand, John. If I had been, I'd have struck harder. What I wanted was to make sure that deck wouldn't get away before we had a chance to count it."

But Hump John was furious. If Shorty and Pat Brown had not been as quick as he was, the gun he drew would have carried death to at least one of the party.

The two men seized him by the wrists, one on either side of him, and Big George reached over almost as quick as they and twisted the revolver from his hand. Then began a struggle such as none of the four had ever seen before.

The pale, slender-looking humpback seemed to have the strength of half a dozen men. Writhing, twisting, snarling, kicking and trying to bite his adversaries, he pulled and threw them all before he was overpowered.

The odds of four to one was too heavy for him, and as the two who had him by the wrists held on tenaciously, he couldn't use his hands. It was not long before they had overcome him and bound him with strips of his own coat. Then they looked at Shorty.

"What does it mean?" asked Pat Brown as soon as he could catch his breath.

"Well, I ain't sure," said Shorty, "but it struck me it would be a good idea to look in the deck for some more jacks. This man is a little too handy about drawing to a three of a kind."

A hasty examination showed no extra jacks, but a count of the cards proved that there were fifty-four in the deck, which to the players who were sitting was proof enough to convict.

First, they divided the money that lay where Hump John had been sitting, each man taking what he had lost as well as they could figure it, and then they turned their attention to the prisoner.

"Is there any good reason why we should not throw you in the river?" demanded Handy, fiercely.

"I don't know any reason why you won't," said Hump John, as savagely as he. "Four cowards that'll set on one man and bind and rob him might better go on and murder him. If you don't, I'll kill every one of you sooner or later."

"You will, hey?" said Handy. "Then I reckon we'd better finish the thing now." And he drew his revolver.

This, however, the others would not have.

"You can fight it out if you like," said Big George, "but there'll be no murder."

Ten minutes later the two men were out on the levee shooting at each other, and there was work for the coroner next morning.—Indianapolis Sentinel.

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